



March 6, 2019

Dear House Finance Committee Members,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association and Emergency Management Association of Ohio, as well as for the betterment of emergency response in Butler County. As the Fairfield Township (Butler County) Fire Chief and Butler County EMA Director, we need your help to protect the first responders in our area.

In the budget as it currently stands, there is language that would allow county commissioners to realign the Emergency Management Agency under the control of the county Sheriff or a county-wide fire chief, which currently, no county-wide fire chiefs exist in Ohio.

Even if limited to only Butler and Stark counties, this legislation is not in the best interest of our county and will gravely impact our ability to facilitate emergency response in our Butler County communities. In our field, we also respond to large emergency events in neighboring counties or even statewide, meaning that this language can have an impact on all 88 counties in Ohio.

While countless negative consequences will be realized by giving control of the EMA to a single elected official, the biggest concern that this amendment brings to light is the funding of the EMA. Currently, EMA operations rely heavily on federal grant funding. This is funding that Stark and Butler counties would likely no longer be eligible for if the EMA is not a neutral entity.

The county commissioners will then need to financially support the EMA. The communications system in our county recently cost \$9 million just for upgrades, a cost that is not uncommon for maintaining the EMA infrastructure in its entirety. Our county budget absolutely cannot sustain this cost, and even if they were to find the money somehow, it would be to the detriment of funding fire departments, law enforcement personnel and other crucial public safety entities.

To attach an amendment with such serious concerns to a bill as large as the Transportation Budget does not allow for the amendment to be addressed based on its own individual merits. We strongly believe that something of this magnitude, with such dire consequences for our local budget as well as public safety, is better suited with stand-alone legislation to be vetted with all interested parties around the table.

Please help us, please help all of the fire chiefs and EMA directors of Stark and Butler counties, and most importantly please help the citizens of Stark and Butler counties by opposing this language in the Transportation Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Thomas".

Chief Tim Thomas, OFE, OFC
Fairfield Township Fire Chief

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Haverkos".

Director Matt Haverkos
Butler County EMA Director